DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 923 HE 017 028

AUTHOR Campbell, Jill F.; Spiro, Louis M.
TITLE Focusing on a Neglected Component of the Student Selection Process: A Statewide Survey of High School Guidance Counselors.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the North East Association for Institutional Research (10th, Hershey, PA, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Admission Criteria; *College Choice; College Faculty; College Programs; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Counselor Role; Educational Quality; Higher Education; *Institutional Evaluation; Institutional Research; Reputation; *School Counselors; State Surveys; *Student Recruitment
IDENTIFIERS State University of New York Coll at Brockport

ABSTRACT

The contribution of high school guidance counselors during the information and inquiry stages of students' selection of a college was assessed. A statewide population survey of all high school counselors in New York yielded 660 usable responses (20 percent). Attention is focused on quality estimations of four criteria for 15 institutions. Quality assessments of faculty, programs, students, and selectivity were made for each of the 15 institutions. Regional and statewide comparisons were developed to allow monitoring changes in particular geographic areas of interest. From the survey data, a current image or college profile was developed to serve as a comparative baseline in successive years as the State University of New York College at Brockport attempts to increase standards and to improve the quality of its entering classes. Based on the findings, it was concluded that Brockport needs to improve its image among its clientele. College admission counselors can effectively enlist the assistance of high school guidance counselors to further its goal. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED240923

FOCUSING ON A NEGLECTED COMPONENT OF THE STUDENT SELECTION PROCESS: A STATEWIDE SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELORS

Presented at the Tenth Annual Conference of the North East Association for Institutional Research at Hershey, Pennsylvania

Jill F. Campbell
Assistant Director of Analytic Studies
SUNY College at Brockport
612 Administration Building
Brockport, NY 14420

Louis M. Spiro
Director of Analytic Studies
SUNY College at Brockport
611 Administration Building
Brockport, NY 14420

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jill F. Campbell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE017028

FOCUSING ON A NEGLECTED COMPONENT OF THE STUDENT SELECTION PROCESS: A STATE-WIDE SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELORS

Jill F. Campbell
Louis M. Spiro
Office of Analytic Studies
S.U.N.Y. College at Brockport

ABSTRACT

This report discusses the overlooked importance of high school guidance counselors during the information and inquiry stages of students selecting colleges. A state-wide population survey of all 3,250 high school counselors was conducted with an overall response rate above 20% (660 useable surveys). This paper focuses on the portion of the survey which elicited quality estimations of four criteria for fifteen institutions. From the data, an institutional image baseline was developed. It will serve as a comparative baseline in successive years as the State University of New York, College at Brockport attempts to increase standards and to improve the quality of its entering classes.

INTRODUCTION AND PERSPECTIVE

Brockport is part of the 64 campus State University of New York (S.U.N.Y.) system. As one of twelve four-year Arts and Sciences colleges in the system, there is little differentiation in regards to "cost of attending" and "financial aid packaging". Also, the availability of programs is almost universal. A matrix of program overlap indicates that nine of eleven campuses overlap 35 of our 39 program offerings by more than 50%. In addition, applications for admission are not made directly to this institution. Rather, they are sent to a central applications processing center. Students are allowed one college choice for the basic application fee and then must pay $10 for their credentials to be sent to each additional college. This discourages most students from listing several colleges. So, bearing in mind that for all practical purposes the college is unable to develop a competitive edge regarding cost, financial aid packaging and program uniqueness, it is critical that this institution is considered for designation as one of the top choices on the application form. Otherwise, for all intents and purposes, it is out of the intitial consideration set. In addition, this college is experiencing an enrollment decline which began in 1976 and is continuing through Spring 1983.

For the reasons stated above, it is crucial that this institution concentrate on improving its communications with college-bound high school students. This is where the high school guidance counselors are important to admissions recruiting strategies. They can serve as a liaison and, expressly, as an excellent source of information in the primary stage of the student selection process. Counselors influence whose catalogues are shown and they can narrow or define students' choices as they make recommendations.

PURPOSE

In this paper, it is our intention to focus on the comparative quality profiles of different types of institutions as reflected by high school guidance counselors in a state-wide survey conducted in May-June 1982. The types of institutions being compared included both public and private four-year universities and colleges and two-year agricultural and technical colleges. Quality assessments of faculty, programs, students and selectivity were made. Regional, as well as, state-wide comparisons were developed to allow for monitoring changes in particular geographic areas of interest.

Specifically, from the survey data collected we developed a current image or college profile to serve as a comparative baseline as the college tries to increase the quality of its entering classes. It is recognized that in the past this institution was perceived as a school of last resort. Admissions criteria were very liberal and many students were accepted who had been denied at other SUNY colleges. But, that is no longer the case. For Regular Freshmen since 1979, the mean High School Average has increased three points and the total mean SAT scores are up nearly 60 points. Now students are denied admission to Brockport when they have been accepted at one or more of the other SUNY Colleges. With an established baseline, we can monitor changes in the external image as we actually improve quality through increasing standards and selectivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature reveals an abundance of material relating to student choice of colleges. Many of the studies related to prospective students, i.e., students who applied, were accepted and either enrolled or declined acceptance (Hollinger, 1978; Lay and Maguire, 1978; Meganathan, 1979). Yet, another study included an annual survey of the entering freshmen to monitor the college's image and the impact of policy changes (Stern, 1979).

But, according to Kotler, in "Applying Marketing Theory to College Admissions" (1976), high school students go through a seven stage process before

finally enrolling at a particular institution. From our perspective, stages II (information seeking and receiving) and III (specific college inquiries) are of particular importance. This college needs to communicate a positive image of the campus during these two phases. Literature supports increased contact with high school counselors to further the admissions effort, particularly during the information gathering and inquiring periods. As mentioned in "Multicampus Education from a Marketing Perspective", (Kotler, 1978) one means of accomplishing this is through improving the contact with high school counselors. In detailing recruitment strategies, Kotler comments on establishing high school visitation schedules and spending time with the high school counselors. He also lists them as one of the five personal sources from whom students gather information. Then, in the Penn State Study "How College Students Select a College" (Gilmour, Spiro, Dolich, 1978) higher ability students seemed to rely more on guidance counselors as their primary source of information. And, furthermore, Litten, in "Different Strokes in the Applicant Pool: Some Refinements in a Model of Student College Choice" (1982), stressed the importance of maintaining contact with guidance counselors in geographic areas in which the level of parental education is low. Students in these areas require greater assistance from counselors during the information seeking and inquiring stages.

For all the importance of high school counselors, in reviewing the literature, studies of this group are scant, indeed. In essence, we recognize the importance of high school guidance counselors and the absence of major studies conducted utilizing this group.

DATA SOURCES

The major data source was a state-wide survey of high school guidance counselors. It consisted of a four-page pamphlet. The first two pages addressed communications between Brockport and the guidance community; estimations of quality in terms of faculty, programs, students and selectivity for each of the fifteen institutions; quality of specific program areas at Brockport; image impressions derived from multiple sources; types of students typically recommended to Brockport; high school application and matriculation trend data for Brockport; and finally, an evaluation of Brockport graduates. The third page consisted of demographic information on the size of the graduating class; continuing education; distances from Brockport; whether or not the counselor was ever enrolled or visited Brockport; sex; age group; and schools from which the counselor

received undergraduate and graduate degrees. The entire fourth and final page was left open for comments and suggestions. The survey project, completed in August, 1982, was part of a research component requested by a marketing consulting firm contracted by Brockport to investigate and address its enrollment difficulties.

METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument was developed in collaboration with the President's Staff and the marketing consultant. It was finalized and sent to 3,250 high school guidance counselors along with a cover letter from the President and a postage paid return envelope. Upon receipt of a response from a counselor, a thank you note from the President was mailed. A follow-up postcard was sent to non-respondents about three weeks after the initial mailing. A total of 660 valid returns resulted in a response rate over 20%. Surveys were coded and a Command and Edit (CANDE) file created on the Burroughs 6800. Statistical analyses, i.e., frequencies, crosstabs, mean, etc., were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie et al, 1979). Additionally, a meeting was held with the President and several other "key" individuals to determine specific desired outcomes from the analysis. This refined the direction of the survey analysis which was finalized during the distribution, collection and file creation phases.

This paper focuses on the survey portion which elicited ratings, utilizing a five point scale, of the quality of four criteria: faculty, programs, students and selectivity for a comparison of Brockport with fourteen other institutions. Types of institutions listed for comparisons included: eight other SUNY four-year Arts and Science colleges; two SUNY two-year Agricultural and Technical schools; two SUNY University Centers; one four-year private college; and, one private university. Public institutions were chosen based on known competition levels. Using a scale of 1-5, with 1=excellent, 2=good, 3=average, 4=below average, and 5=poor, the responses were tabulated for the four criteria. Then, a 60-cell matrix was developed. Each cell contained the State overall mean score for each of the four criteria by institution (see Table I). Next, we used this matrix to examine the six non-redundant dimension pairs: faculty/programs, faculty/students, faculty/selectivity, programs/students, programs/selectivity and students/selectivity. Then we plotted the means for each of the six groups for each institution (see Tables III-VIII). Finally, we computed the correlation coefficients for each dimension getting a very high positive value in each case (see Table II).

TABLE I: New York State Quality

Institution	Faculty x Rating	Program x Rating	Students x Rating	Selectivity x Rating
1. SUNY College at Brockport	2.3	2.4	2.8	2.9
2. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.6
3. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.4
4. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.6
5. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.1	2.1	2.3	2.3
6. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.4	2.4	2.8	2.8
7. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.3
8. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.4
9. SUNY Arts & Science College	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.5
10. SUNY Ag. & Tech	2.3	2.2	2.9	2.9
11. SUNY Ag. & Tech	2.2	2.1	2.7	2.8
12. SUNY University	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5
13. SUNY University	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.7
14. Independent College	2.0	1.9	2.2	2.2
15. Independent University	1.9	1.8	2.1	2.2

TABLE II: Correlation of Dimension Pairs

Faculty/Programs	Faculty/Students	Faculty/Selectivity
+ 0.97	+ 0.96	+ 0.95
Programs/Students	Programs/Selectivity	Students/Selectivity
+ 0.91	+ 0.90	+ 0.99

The matrix and the dimension graphing served to determine at a glance Brockport's position regarding perceived quality in relation to the other institutions. It also illustrated the group of colleges with which we are placed.

RESULTS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the dimension pairs examination were quite interesting. The means for all institutions were at least average or better. None were below average or poor in any category. Consistently, certain institutions formed clusters. The two SUNY university centers fared the best in all categories. The independent college and university received the next highest quality rating along with two of the nine SUNY Arts and Science Colleges. The third cluster consisted of five SUNY Arts and Science Colleges. The last cluster consisted of two SUNY Arts and Science Colleges and, for three of the pairs, one of the SUNY Ag and Techs. The other SUNY Ag and Tech College stood alone on three of the six variables and was categorized in different clusters for each of the other three variables.

And where did Brockport fall? The perceived image consistently placed Brockport in the lower cluster. State-wide mean quality scores for Faculty and Programs were both "above-average" 2.3 and 2.4, respectively, but not "good". Since the local on-campus perception is one of "university quality faculty and excellent programs", Brockport has a long way to go to change the guidance community's perception to more accurately reflect what is considered reality internally. State-wide mean quality scores for Students and Selectivity were only slightly better than "average" 2.8 and 2.9, respectively. Since higher admissions standards have been adopted recently and selection has resulted in higher quality students, it is important that this message is conveyed quickly to guidance counselors so they can make appropriate recommendations to their college bound high school students.

Having developed a quality profile in relation to the fourteen other institutions, we also isolated other colleges with similar images. Simultaneously, we identified the colleges with whom we would like to be positioned. The immediate goal is to be perceived as one of the higher quality Arts and Sciences Colleges, and the ultimate aim is to be positioned with the SUNY University Centers. If the counselors' quality assessment for Brockport were to be modified sufficiently to move us into either one of those clusters, then the external image would more closely match the internal quality assessment.

In order to advance, this institution needs to improve its image among its clientele. College admission counselors can effectively enlist the assistance of high school guidance counselors to further this goal. This can be accomplished by keeping them current with updated catalogues, a newsletter, an expanded schedule of high school visits, by expanding the number of sites for high school college nights, more personal contacts, and feedback on their students who eventually enroll. It would be difficult to do this for every high school in the State. Survey results document differentiation regarding quality profiles within regions of the state, e.g. Northeastern, Central, Western, etc... Brockport received lower ratings of quality in the Genesee Valley Region in which it is geographically located. This indicates a need for substantial public relations/communications work in our "own backyard" to increase perceptions of quality. Therefore, we recommend that marketing be conducted on a regional basis. We also recommend that this survey be conducted annually late in the Fall Semester or early in the Spring Semester to monitor changes in college policies and external quality assessments. Since the last survey, there have been a multitude of policy changes. It would be most opportune to repeat this survey early in Spring 1984 to determine if our internal changes are reflected in our external image.

IMPLICATIONS

The value of this study is based upon its nature and scope. It takes into consideration the estimations and expertise of an underutilized group, high school guidance counselors, to profile the quality of fifteen colleges using four criteria. Ultimately, it allows recommendations for marketing strategies for Admissions recruiting and enrollment management, and for the continual evaluation and refinement of these activities.

TABLE III: Group Means for the Faculty/Programs Dimensions

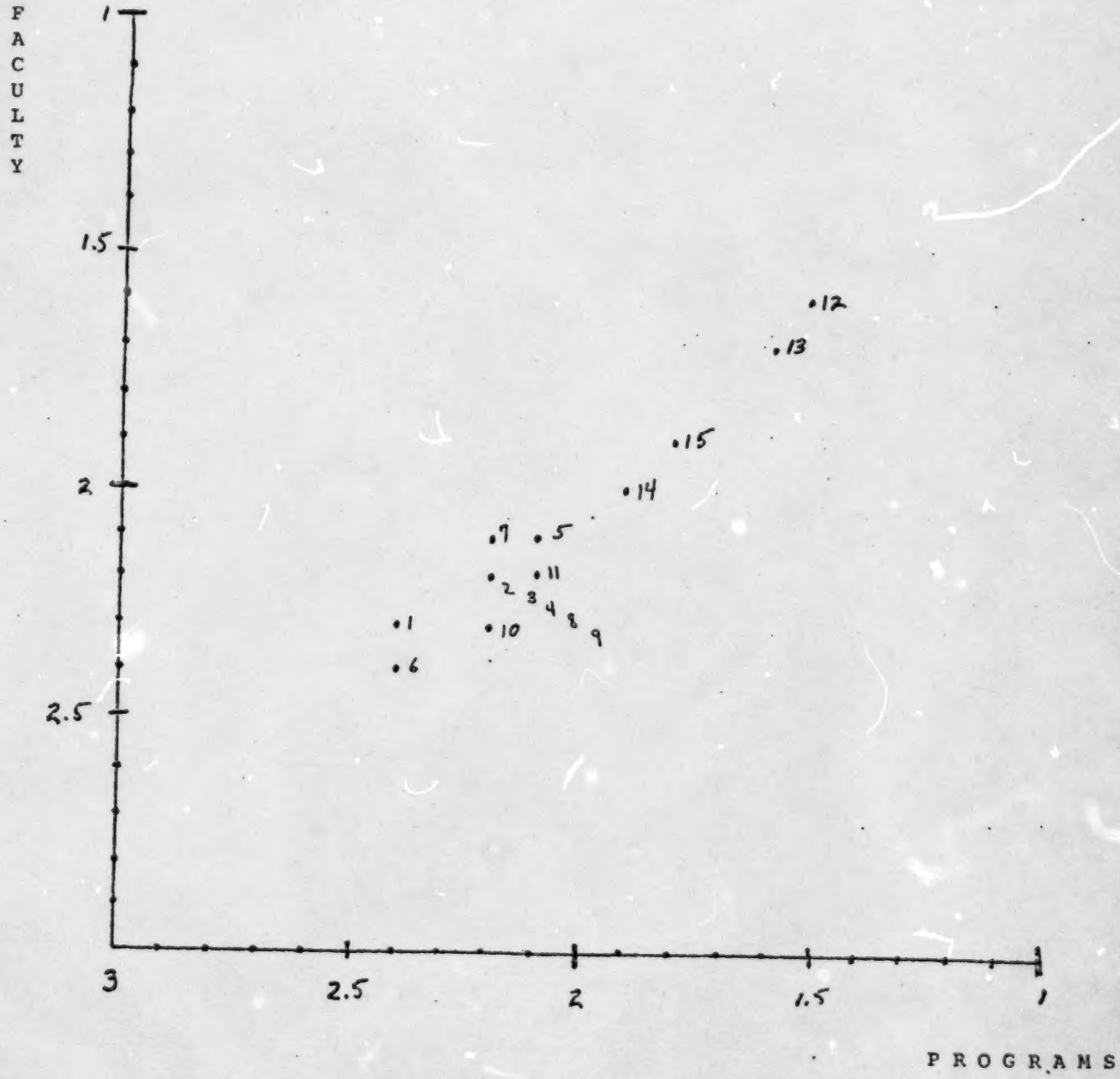


TABLE IV: Group Means for the Faculty/Student Dimensions

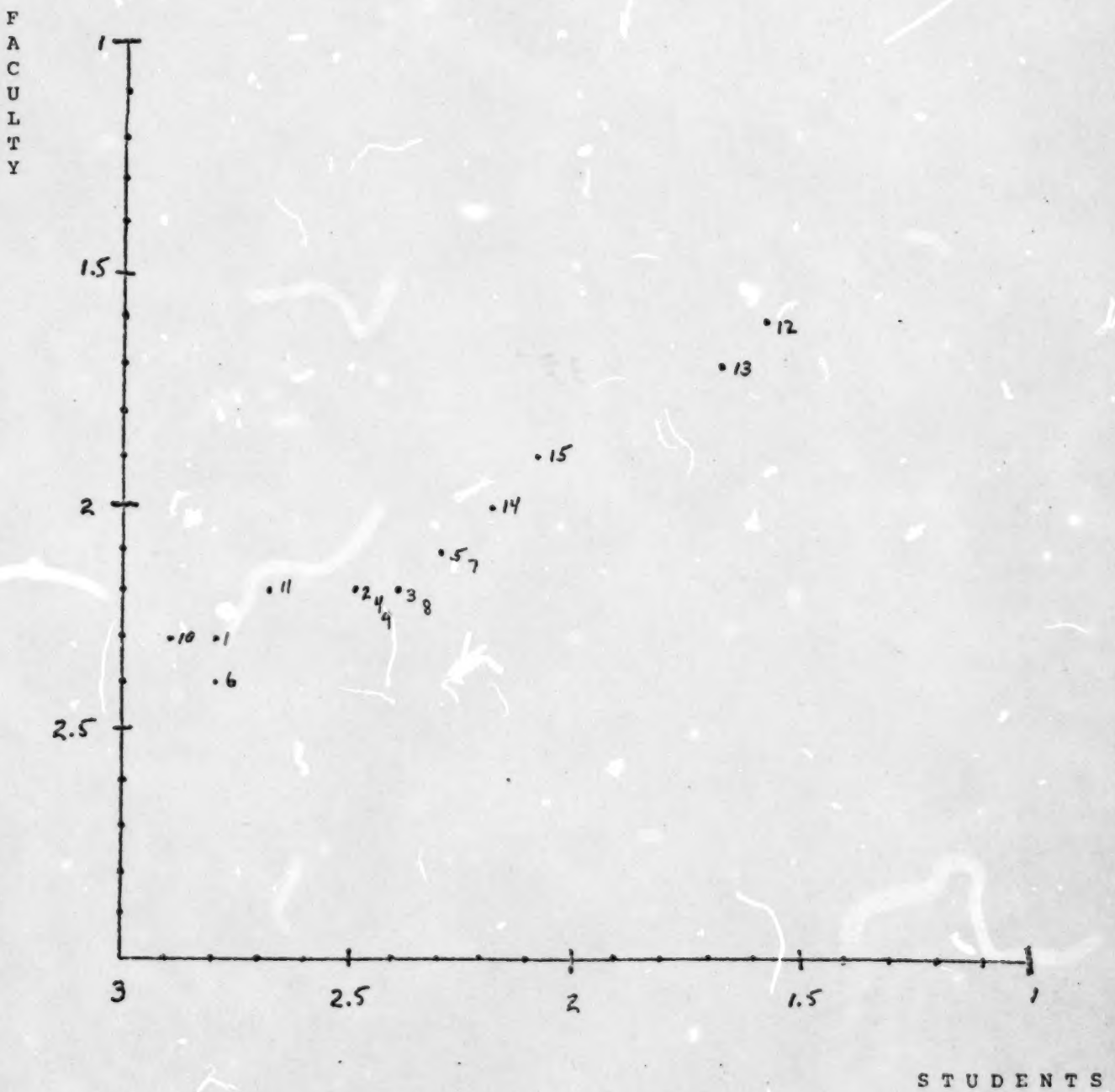


TABLE V: Group Means for the Faculty/Selectivity Dimensions

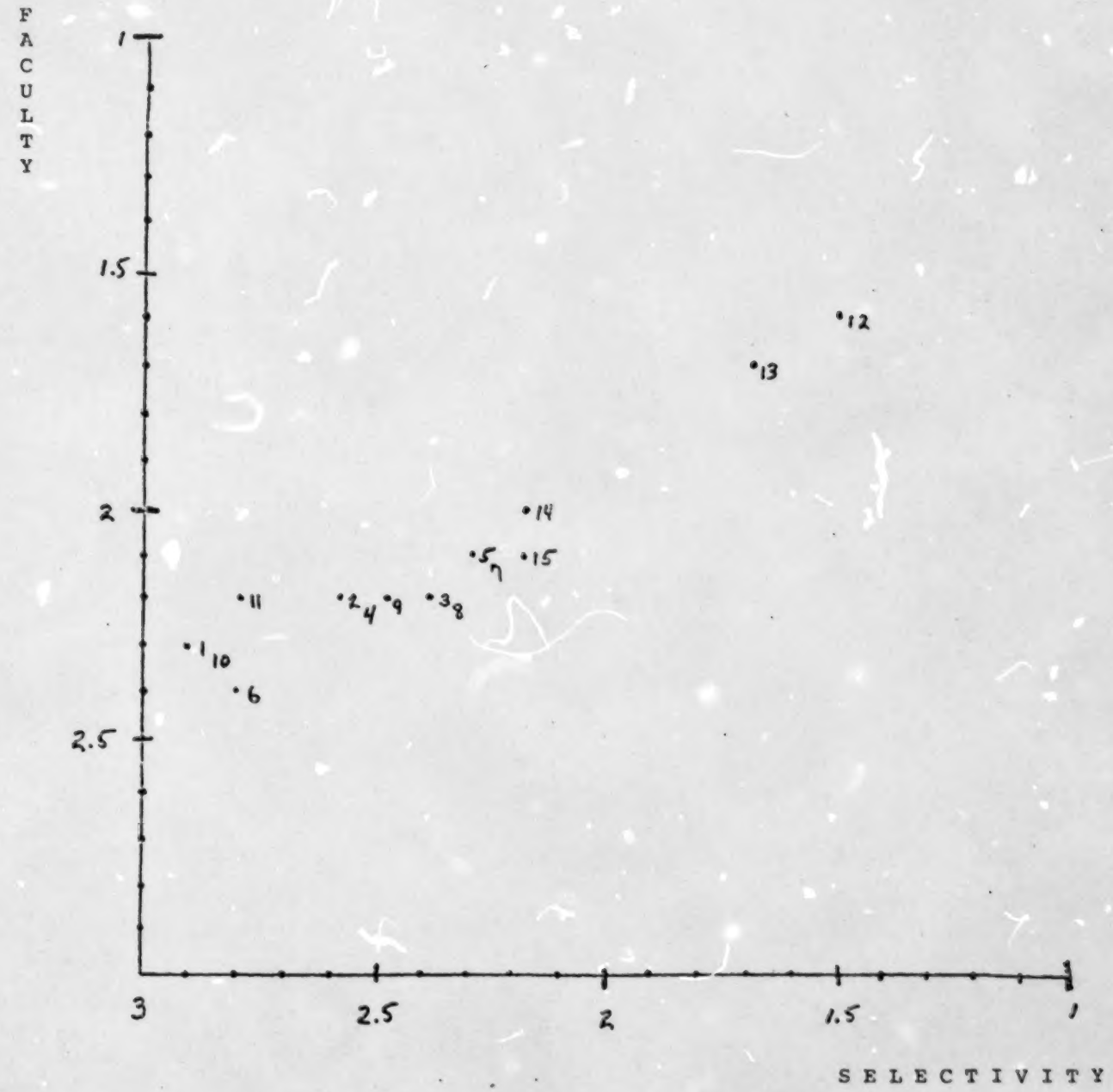


TABLE VI: Group Means for the Programs/Student Dimensions

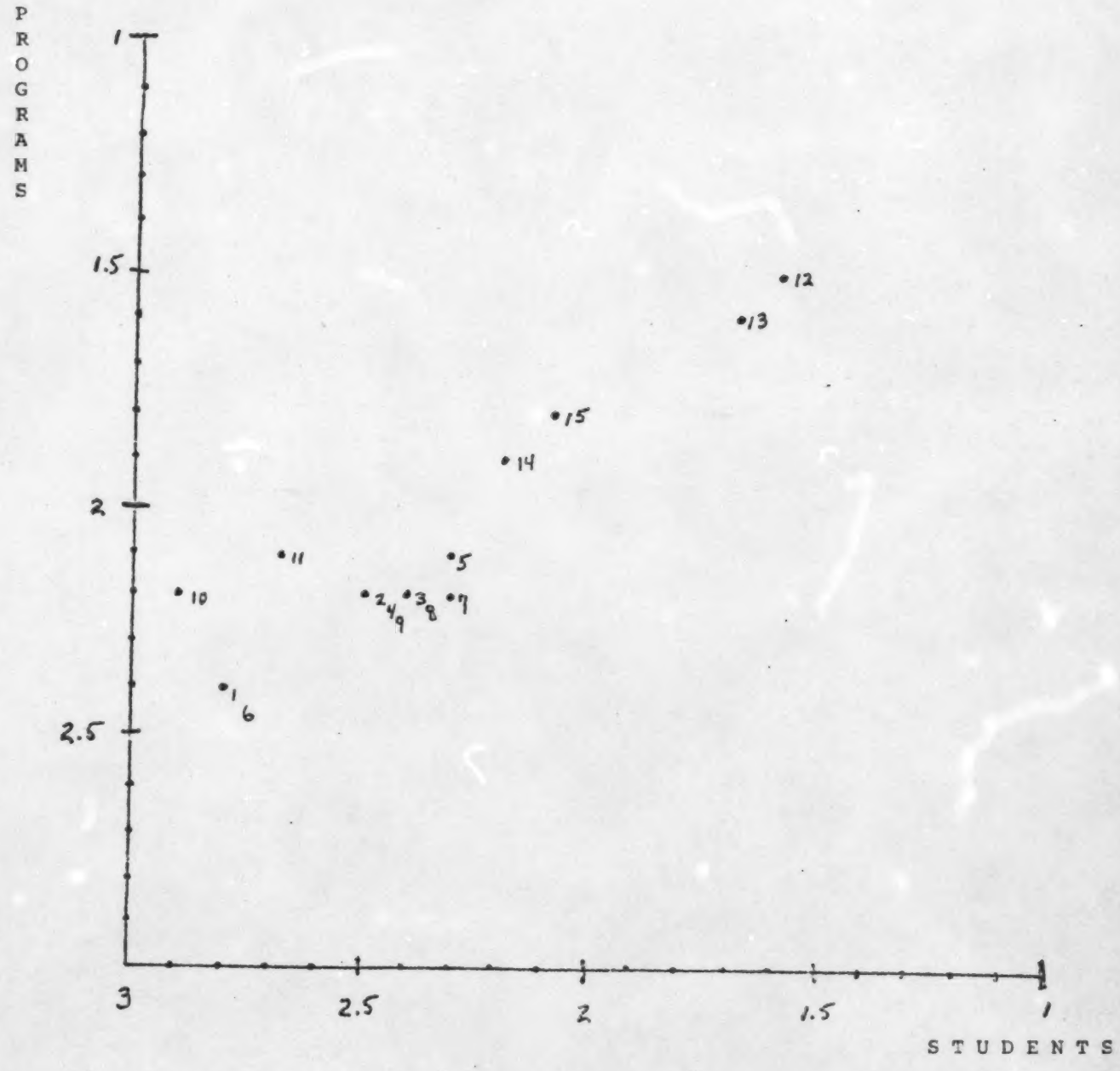


TABLE VII: Group Means for the Programs/Selectivity Dimensions

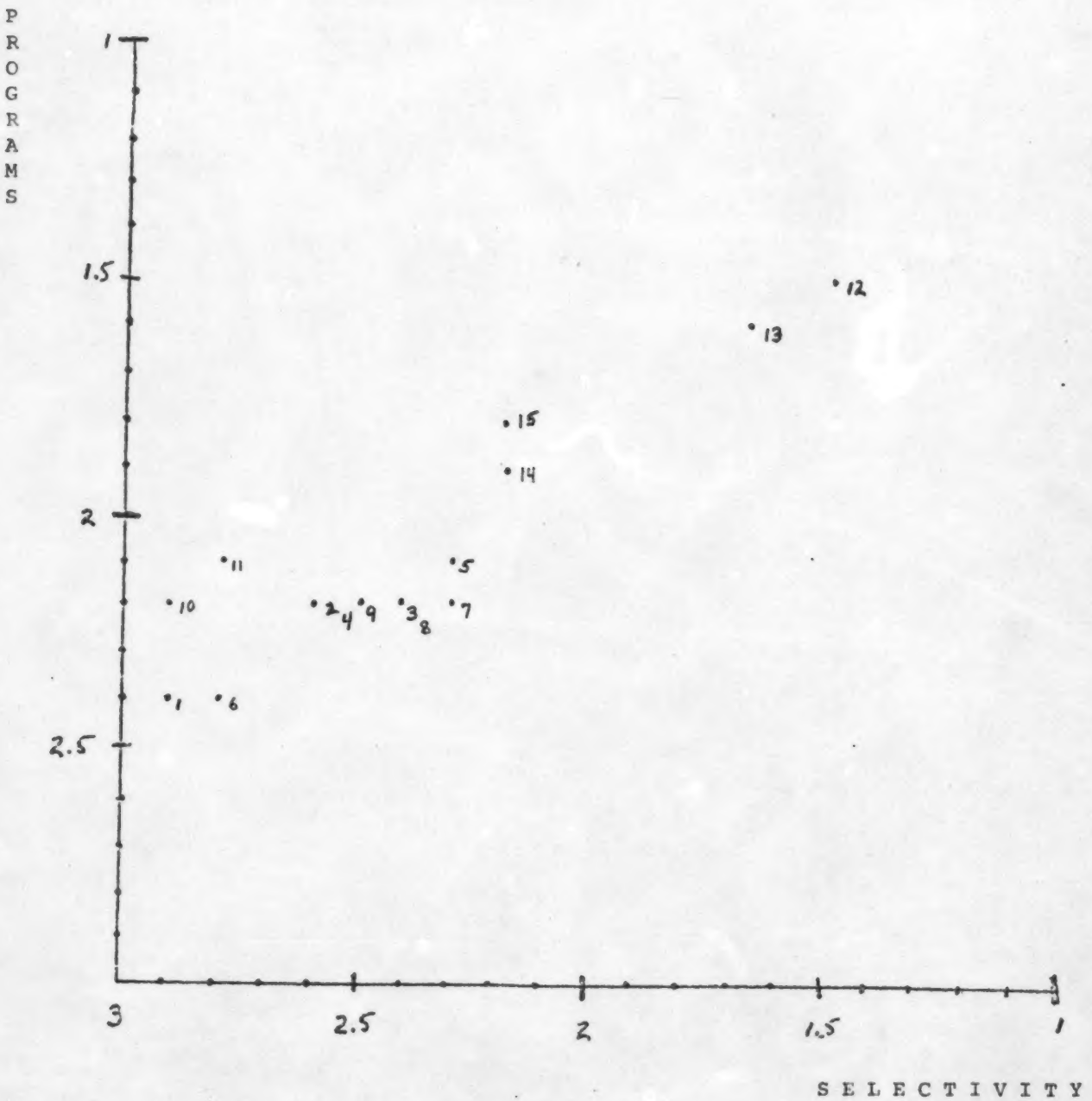
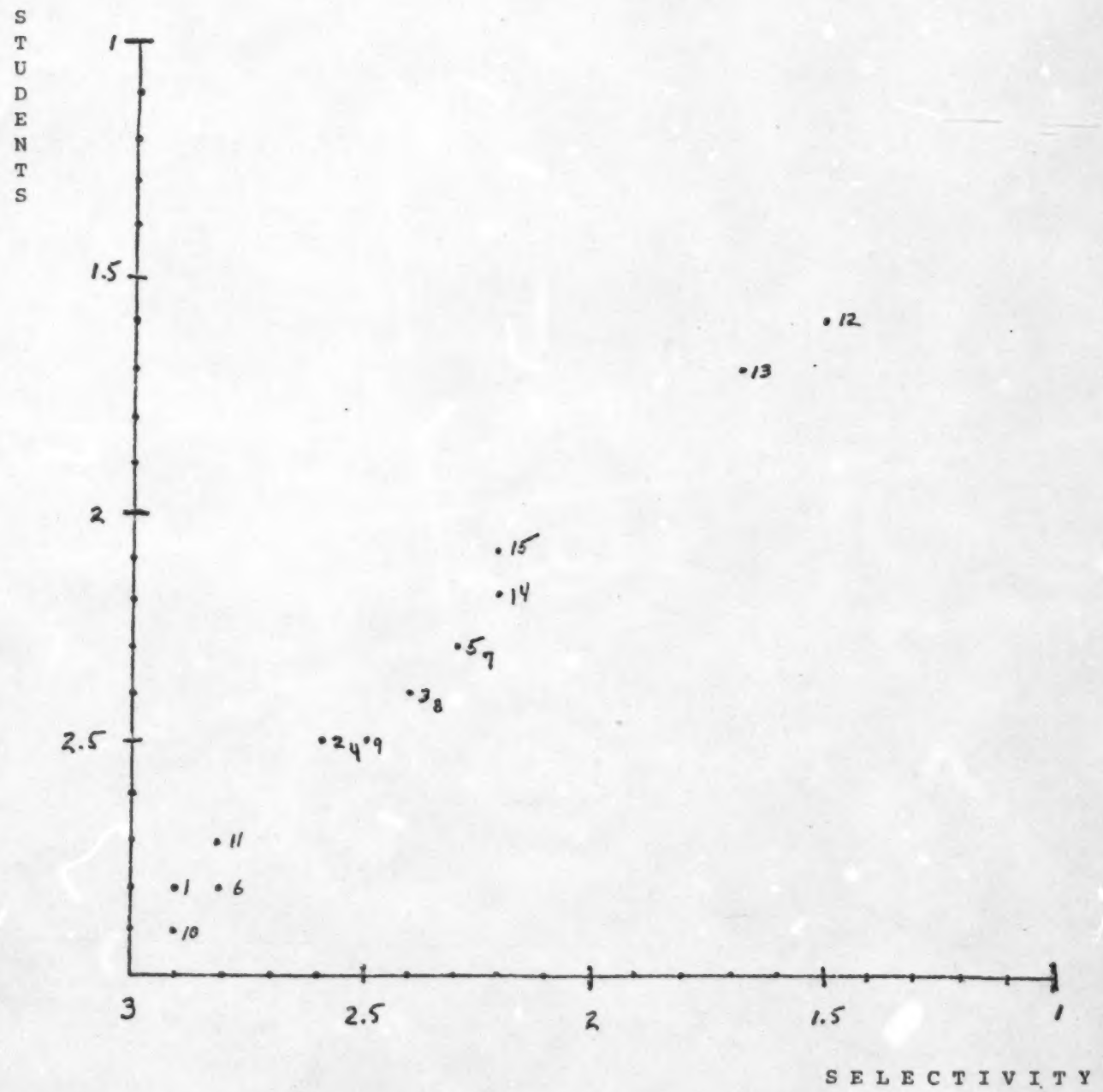


TABLE VIII: Group Means for the Students/Selectivity Dimensions



REFERENCES

Gilmour, J. E., Spiro, L. M. and Dolich, "How High School Students Select a College", Paper Presented at A.I.R., Houston, 1978.

Hollinger, R. C., "Penn State's Competition: What Types of Institutions and Why Students Choose Them", NEAIR-Institutional Research: New Responses to New Demands, pp. 103-113. 1978.

Kotler, P. "Applying Marketing Theory to College Admissions", A Role for Marketing in College Admissions, pp. 54-72. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1976.

Kotler, P. "Multicampus Education from a Marketing Perspective", Unpublished, presentation for Annual Conference of SUNY College and University Relations Council at Monticello, New York. 1977.

Lay, R. and Maguire, J. "Summary of: Competition in Higher Education: Boston College Research Findings", NEAIR-Institutional Research: New Responses to New Demands, pp. 115-124. 1978.

Litten, L. "Different Strokes in the Applicant Pool", Journal of Higher Education, 1982.

Meganathon, A., "Perception: Is it Just in the Mind of the Beholder?", NEAIR-Institutional Research and Creative Change, pp. 269-279, 1979.

Nie, N. H., Hull, C. H., Jenkins, J. G., Steinbrenner, K., and Bent, C. H. (Eds.) SPSS Statistical Pacakage for the Social Sciences. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979.

Stern, J. M. "Determining the 'Importance' of Reasons for Choosing Individual Colleges", NEAIR-Institutional Research and Creative Change, pp. 281-290, 1979.